PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE:
SPEECH ACT THEORY

LECTURE NOTES:

PROFESSOR: Chris Latoleis, Chair
Philosophy Department
Kalamazoo College
Humphrey House #201
Telephone # 337-7076
Office Hours:
- Monday 1:00 - 2:30
- Tuesday 11:30 - 12:30
- Thursday 11:30 - 12:30
- By Appointment

COURSE GOALS:
This course introduces students to some basic issues in that branch of the philosophy of language devoted to the study of utterances. This area of contemporary philosophical linguistics is known as "speech act theory" or "pragmatics." We begin with an examination of the basic structure and classification of utterances and then turn to the analysis of indirect speech acts, metaphorical utterances, and communication via implication. Next, we study the variety of different ways in which speakers refer to things via indexicals, pronouns, and definite descriptions. One of the central questions addressed in contemporary pragmatics is how a hearer understands or "figures out" what a speaker is saying and doing. We will examine two influential and competing conceptions of linguistic comprehension: "bottom-up" inferential and "top-down" holistic models of language processing. With such resources in hand, we then examine the complexity of language use in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. In the next segment of the course, we turn to a highly influential account of speech acts - a theory of "communicative action" -- that emphasizes the potential of speech acts to secure mutual understanding and to constitute action coordination. We test this controversial view of language as having such a rational action-coordinating function by analyzing three David Mamet plays -- Glengarry Glen Ross, Oleanna, and American Buffalo -- which exhibit Mamet's dark and poignantly evocative view of language as agonistic contention and predatory subterfuge. In the final third of the course, we become familiar with Mikhail Bakhtin's views regarding the highly refined and context-specific ways in which modern speakers use language, which provides a strong connection to literary analysis.

EVALUATION:
Students will be evaluated on the basis of class participation, vocabulary quizzes, a midterm assignment, and a final paper.

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<th>TYPE OF EVALUATION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation: Seminar presentations, classroom discussion and email correspondence</td>
<td>1 @ 30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Assignment</td>
<td>6 @ 5%</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper (10-15 pages)</td>
<td>1 @ 30%</td>
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POLICIES:
Students are expected to follow the reading schedule and to come to class prepared to actively discuss the texts they have read. More specifically, students must bring their texts to class with marginal notes, highlighted or underlined passages of particular importance, and pages marked where they have encountered difficulties in understanding the material. Quizzes offer students the opportunity to identify and to clarify central terms and concepts. The midterm assignments allow student to write essays on key philosophical issues and arguments, and the final paper offers students the opportunity to respond in depth to a single topic. The final paper is due on the day scheduled for the final examination. 3 unexcused absences will result in a full grade reduction. Late papers will be marked down a half grade for the first day and a full grade for the second day. All work must be turned in at the end of term, unless alternative assignments have been given by the instructor.

REQUIRED TEXTS:
- Bakhtin, M. M. Speech Genre and Other Late Essays (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1986).

RECOMMENDED TEXTS:
GERMAN ACROSS THE CURRICULUM COMPONENT: Selected texts may be read in the German original. GAC students will be given alternative assignments and weekly tutorials.

BRIDGE READING COMPONENT: Students interested in linking course material to their major course of study will be given special readings and assignments. Tutorial meetings are required, and the final paper must be completed in consultation with a professor in the student's home department.

English and Foreign Language: Students interested in exploring how speech act theory can be used for either literary analysis or second-language instruction are encouraged to write a final paper on this interdisciplinary topic.

Political Science and Psychology: Students interested in examining the use of speech act theory for the analysis of social power are encouraged to write a final research paper on this topic. Possible readings from Judith Butler, Axel Honneth, Louis Althusser, Slavoj Zizek, or Iris Marion Young.

READING SCHEDULE

1. INTRODUCTION:

WEEK ONE

• TUESDAY:
  ○ Course Mechanics
  ○ Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics: Three levels of abstraction

2. THE BASIC STRUCTURE AND ELEMENTARY CLASSIFICATION OF SPEECH ACTS:

• THURSDAY
  ○ "What is a Speech Act" (John Searle, 1969)
  ○ Medina: "Communication and Speech Acts"

WEEK TWO

• TUESDAY
  ○ "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts" (John Searle, 1979)
  ○ Medina: "Meaning, Sense, and Interpretation"
  ○ Quiz #1.

• THURSDAY
  ○ "Linguistic Communication: A Schema for Speech Acts" (Bach & Harnish 1979)
  ○ Medina: "Indeterminacy and Language Learning: Communication as the Meeting of Minds"

3. INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS, METAPHOR, AND IMPLICATION:

WEEK THREE

• TUESDAY
  ○ "Indirect Speech Acts" (John Searle, 1975)
  ○ Reading of Amelia Bedelia
  ○ "Literal Meaning" (John Searle, 1979)
  ○ Midterm Assignment

• THURSDAY
  ○ Medina: "Linguistic Creativity and Relativism"
  ○ Quiz #2.

Thursday Evening Movie: Twelfth Night (8:00 PM, Dewing 103).

4. MEANING AND REFERENCE: INDEXICALS AND DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS:

WEEK FOUR

• TUESDAY
  ○ "Reference and Definite Descriptions" (Keith Donnellan, 1966)
  ○ Quiz #3

• THURSDAY
  ○ "How to Bridge the Gap Between Meaning and Reference" (Howard Wettstein, 1984)
  ○ Medina: "Speakers, Linguistic Communities and Histories of Use"

5. MODELS OF LINGUISTIC COMPREHENSION: THE SPEECH ACT SCHEMA AND ITS CRITICS:

WEEK FIVE

• TUESDAY:
  ○ "The Pragmatics of What is Said" (Francois Recanati, 1999)
  ○ Literal Meaning
    ■ Introduction
    ■ Two Approaches to 'what is said'

• THURSDAY:
  ○ Literal Meaning
    ■ Primary Pragmatic Processes
    ■ The Syncratic View
6. THE CLASSIFICATION, FUNCTIONS AND VALIDITY DIMENSIONS OF SPEECH-ACTS: COMMUNICATIVE VERSUS STRATEGIC ACTION:

WEEK SIX

- TUESDAY
  - "Toward a Critique of a Theory of Meaning" (Habermas).

Wednesday Evening Movie: Glenbarry Glen Ross (8:00 PM, Dewing 103).

- THURSDAY
  - "Social Action, Purposive Activity, and Communication" (Habermas)
  - Quiz #5.

WEEK SEVEN

- TUESDAY
  - "Reflections on Communicative Pathology" (Habermas [Handout])
  - Medina: "Language and Identity"

Evening Movie: Oleanna (8:00 PM, Dewing 103).

- THURSDAY
  - "Actions, Speech Acts, Linguistically Mediated Interactions, and the Lifeworld" (Habermas)
  - Quiz #6

7. THE PROBLEM OF SPEECH GENRES AND EMPIRICAL PRAGMATICS:

WEEK EIGHT

- TUESDAY
  - "The Problem of Speech Genres," from Bakhin, M. M. Speech Genre and Other Late Essays

Evening Movie: American Buffalo (8:00 PM, OU 103).

- THURSDAY
  - "The Problem of Speech Genres" (Continued)
  - Midterm Assignment Due

8. THE EXTENSION OF SPEECH-ACT THEORY TO LITERARY ANALYSIS:

WEEK NINE

- TUESDAY
  - Literal Meaning
    - Non-literary Uses
    - From Literalism to Contextualism
  - THURSDAY:
    - "On the Distinction between Poetic and Communicative Uses of Language" (Habermas)
    - Review

9. REVIEW AND EVALUATIONS:

WEEK TEN

- TUESDAY
  - Review for Final Assignment
  - Student Evaluations

FINALS WEEK